

L. Voronkova

HAPPY



DAYS

Translated by Fainna Glagoleva

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The children were sitting on the logs by the birch trees and talking.

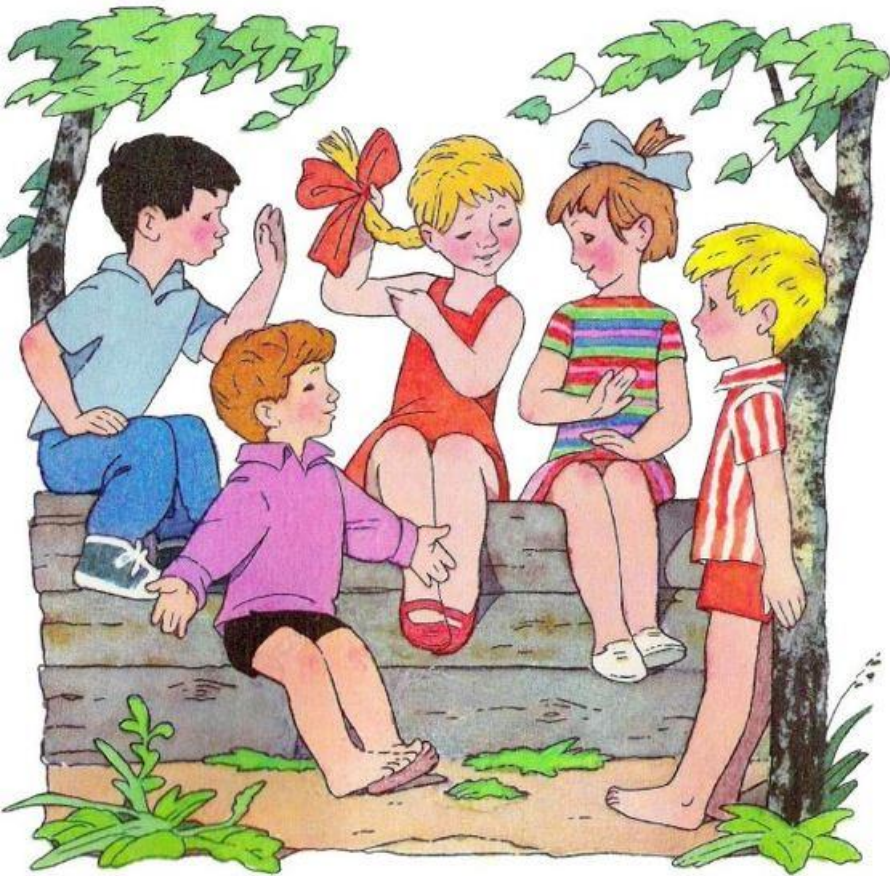
"This is my happy day," Lena said. "See my new bow? See how pretty it is?"
She held up her braid and showed them her new bow.

"This is my happy day, too," said Tanya. "I have a new box of crayons. A whole big box."

"What's so good about that?" said Petya. "I have a fishing rod. I can catch as many fish as I want to. What's so good about your crayons? You'll use them up, and then you won't have any left."

Dima wanted to have something to boast about, too.

"I have a shirt with long sleeves! See?" he said and spread his arms wide so they could see what a nice shirt he had on.



Vanya listened, but said nothing.

"Vanya doesn't have anything to be happy about. Not even a teeny-weeny something," Lena said.

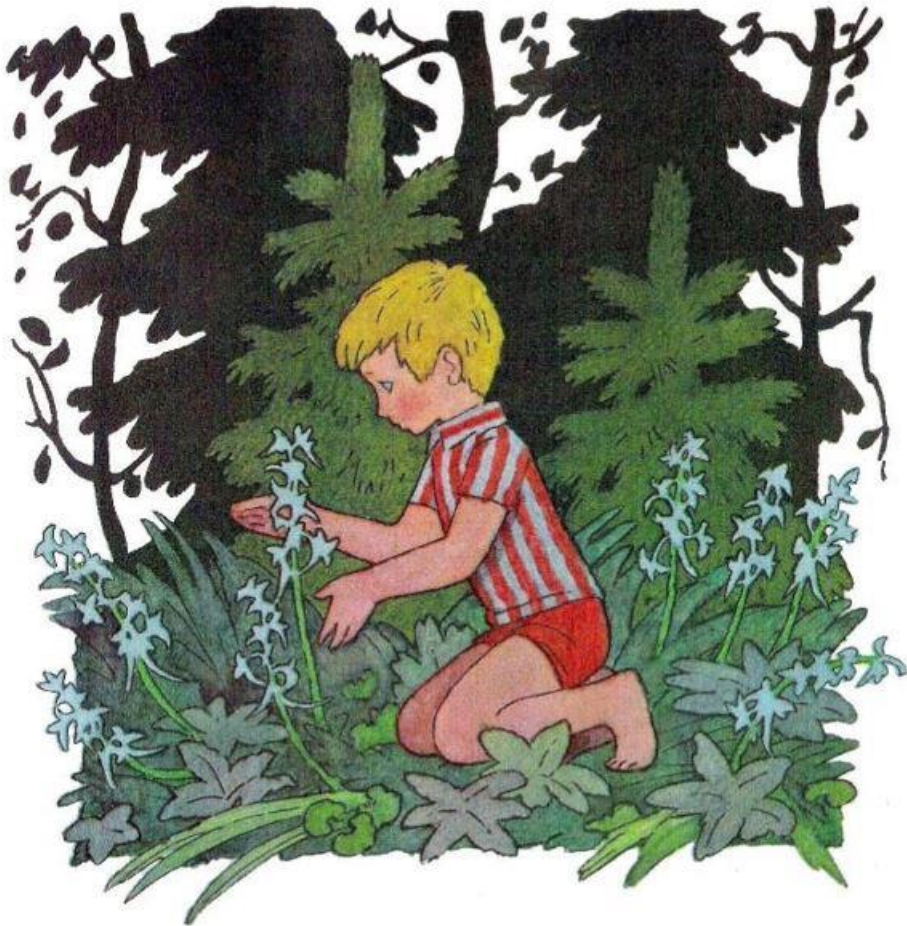
"Yes, I do. I saw some flowers," Vanya said.

The other children all started speaking at once.

"What kind of flowers?"

"Where did you see them?"

"In the woods. In a clearing. When I got lost. It was late and started getting dark. But the flowers were full of light."



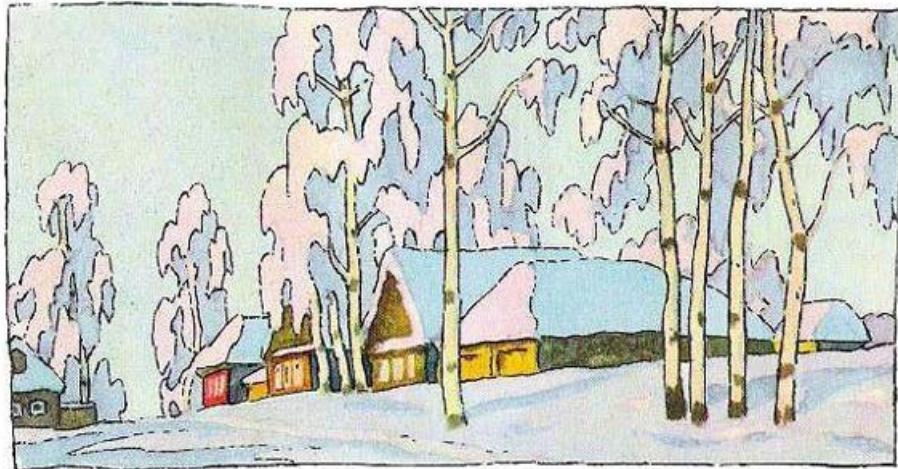
His friends laughed. They all thought he was silly.

"The woods are full of flowers. That's nothing special to be happy about."

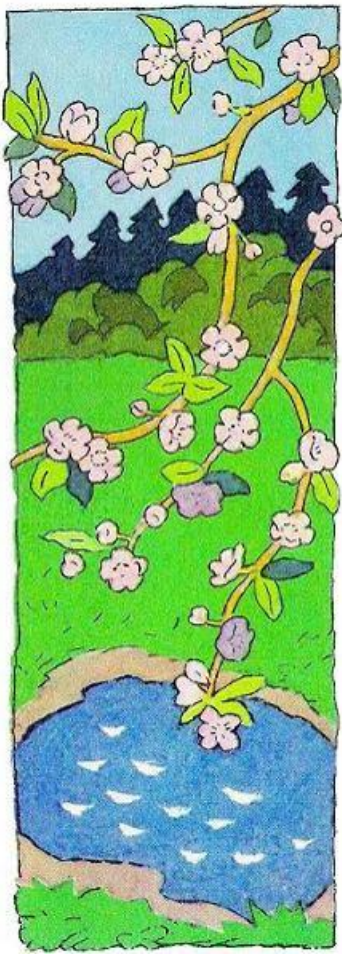
"In the winter I saw the roofs," Vanya said. This made them laugh still harder.

"Don't you see the roofs in the summer?"

"Sure, I do. But there was snow on them in the winter. And the sun was shining. The roofs were blue on one side and pink on the other. And they sparkled."



"Humph! We've all seen snow on the roofs. But you made up the part about them being pink and blue," Lena said.



"Sure, he did. He's just teasing us!" said Petya.

"Maybe there's some other happy thing you can tell us about," Tanya said.

"All right. I saw some silver fishes."

Dima jumped up. "Where?"

"Real ones? Real silver fishes?" Now Petya also jumped up. "In the pond or in the river?"

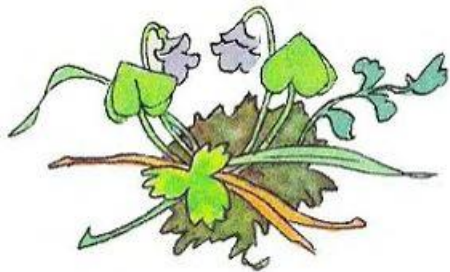
"In a puddle."

They all shrieked with laughter, but Petya grumbled, "I said he was just teasing!"

"No, I'm not. There was a puddle under the apple tree after the rain. It was as blue as the sky. And the sun was shining in it. And the wind was blowing. The water kept shivering. That's when I saw the silver fishes in it."

"He's just making things up," Lena said and laughed. "He really doesn't have any happy days."

Tanya seemed to be thinking about something. Then she said, "Maybe he's had more happy days than us. Because he finds them everywhere."



A Whole Week

Mommy left for Moscow, but before she left she said, "I don't want you to miss me, Vanya. I'll be back in a week. As soon as you see a red letter day on the calendar you'll know I'm coming home."



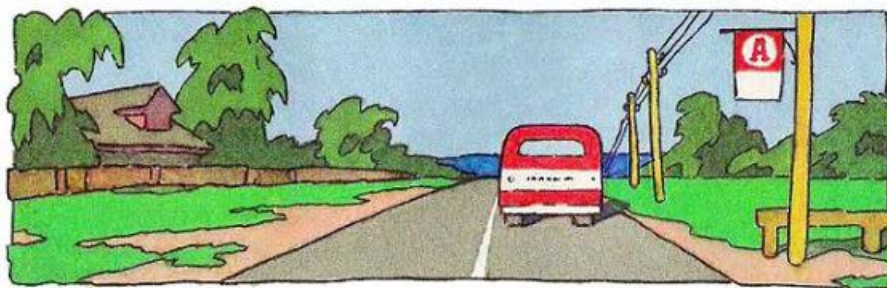
"When'll that be?"

"Sunday is a red letter day. That's in seven days from now."

"Seven days! But you said you're only going for a week."

Mommy laughed. "Seven days make a week. It'll be over before you know it."

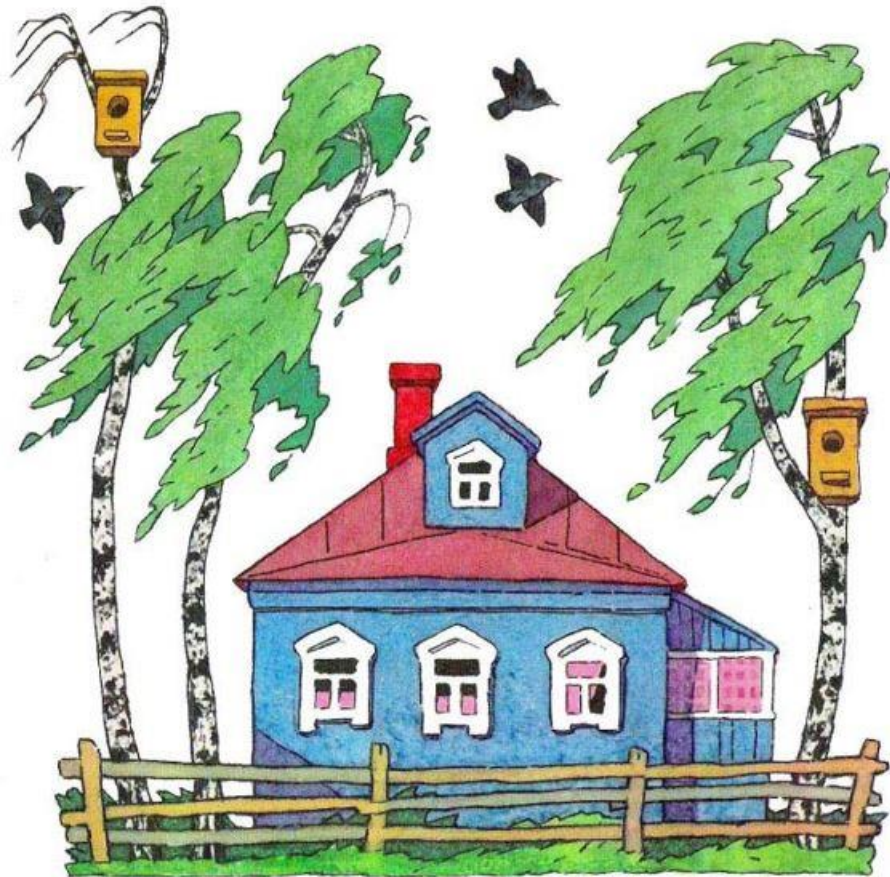
She said goodbye to Daddy, Grandma and Vanya and was gone.



Monday

On Monday Grandma said, "I can't run around after you, Vanya, so try not to get into mischief."

"All right."



Vanya went outside and saw his friends Grinya and Fedya.

"There's a moose in the woods," Grinya said.

"The shepherd saw it. He saw it when he was out in the meadow with the horses at night. The moose came out of the woods and went to the lake to drink. Boy, I wish I could see it!"

"Let's go then," Vanya said.

Fedya stared at him. "Where'll we find it?"

"We'll look for it." Vanya was all set to go, but Grandma had heard them talking and called to them from the window.

"Don't go to the woods, boys. You're not old enough to go there by yourselves. You'll get lost. Play in the yard."

The lawn in the yard was grassy and green. There were young birch trees near the fence. A bird-house had been nailed to one of them.



"Let's watch the starlings feed their babies," Vanya said.

The boys sat down on the bench and watched the birds. First, the mother bird flew up carrying a big bug in her beak.

A moment later the bird-house was filled with loud cheeping. The baby starlings were all shouting at once: "It's mine! It's mine!"

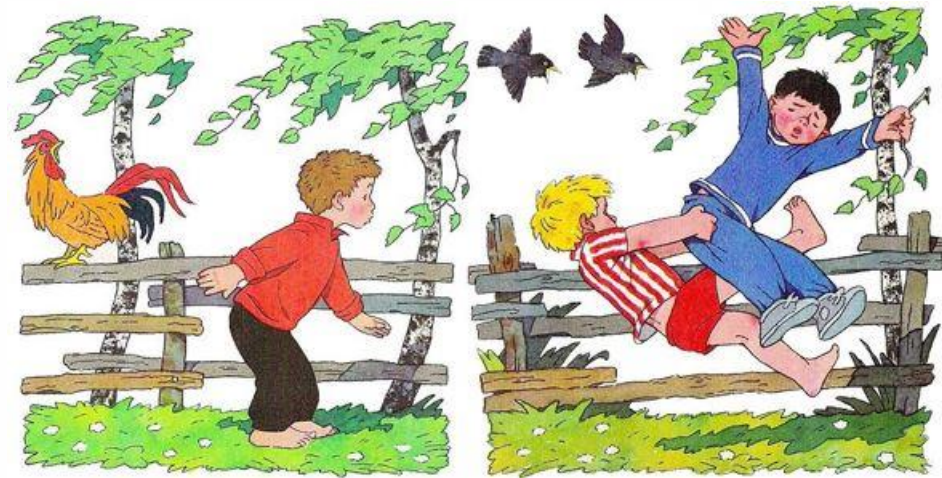
"Watch me climb the tree," Grinya said.

"What for?" Vanya asked.

"To get a baby bird." Grinya climbed the fence and grabbed hold of a branch.

"Get down!" Vanya shouted. "Don't you touch them!"

Grinya was stronger than Vanya, but Vanya was not afraid of him. He climbed onto the fence and grabbed hold of Grinya's leg, pulling both of them down. Grinya scratched his cheek, and Vanya tore his shirt. They both toppled over and then jumped up, red-faced and as angry as two roosters.



"Who says I can't take one?" Grinya shouted.

"I do!" Vanya shouted back.

And he wouldn't let him.

Grinya finally went home in a huff.

"I'd never fight," Fedya said.

Vanya did not reply.

He went back into the house.



When Grandma saw him she shook her head and said, "Didn't you promise you'd be a good boy? You've been fighting, and you tore your shirt."

The way Grandma saw it, this was all true. He had been fighting and he had torn his shirt.



Though Vanya didn't say anything, he was thinking, "But I saved the baby birds!"



Tuesday

Vanya's father was an agronomist.

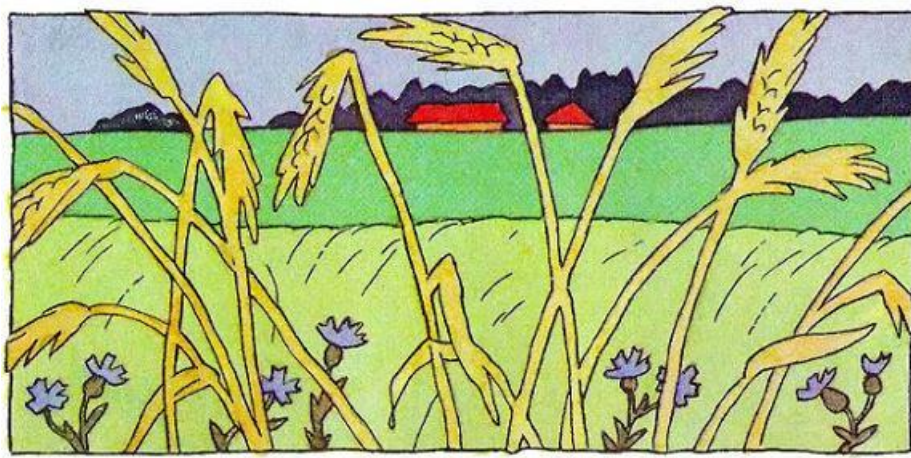
He would set out for the fields every morning to see how the ploughing was coming along.

He had to see if the seeds that were going to be planted were healthy. Then, after they were planted, he had to see how the green shoots were coming up.

Daddy's work was very interesting.

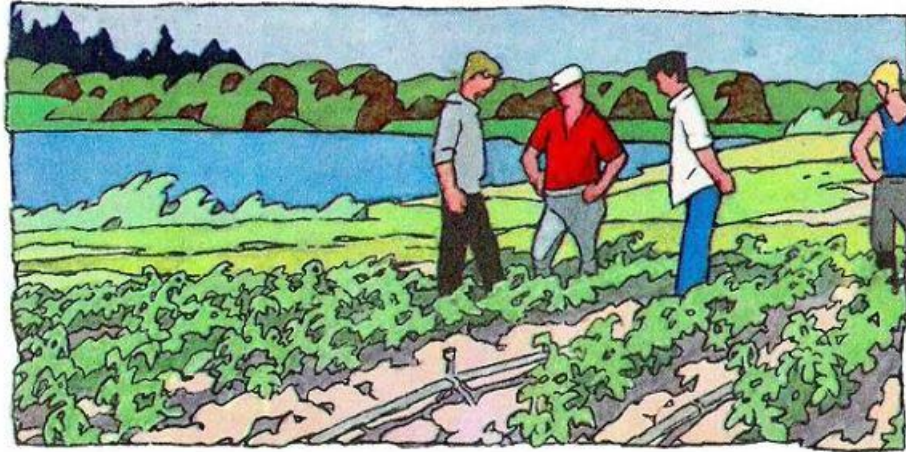
On Tuesday he said to Vanya, "Come along with me. You've been getting into mischief and fighting here. They've set up a new sprinkler in the field. You'll see how it works."

Vanya was very happy. Daddy lifted him up into the saddle, got on behind, and they trotted off to the fields.



It was a very hot summer. There had been no rain for a lone time. The horse trotted along the dry, white road, raising clouds of dust. At last, they reached a big field. Dry ears of wheat rustled in the field.

"The wheat's crying for rain," Daddy said. "Otherwise, the grain won't ripen."



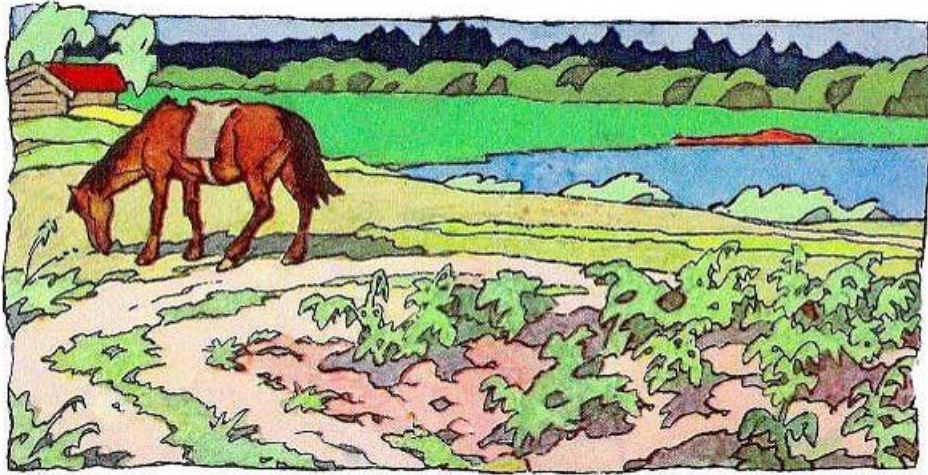
The next field was a potato field. The furrows had become dry and white from the sun. The potato vines were stunted. They couldn't grow properly. There were buds on some of the vines, but they weren't strong enough to blossom and drooped in the sun.

"Are the potatoes crying for rain, too?" Vanya wanted to know.

"Oh, yes! And that's just what we'll give them today."

Vanya looked up at the sky. There was not a cloud in sight. Where would the rain come from?

The collective farm chairman and some other men were walking up and down along the furrows. Daddy dismounted and set Vanya down.



"Stay here and watch it rain," he said.

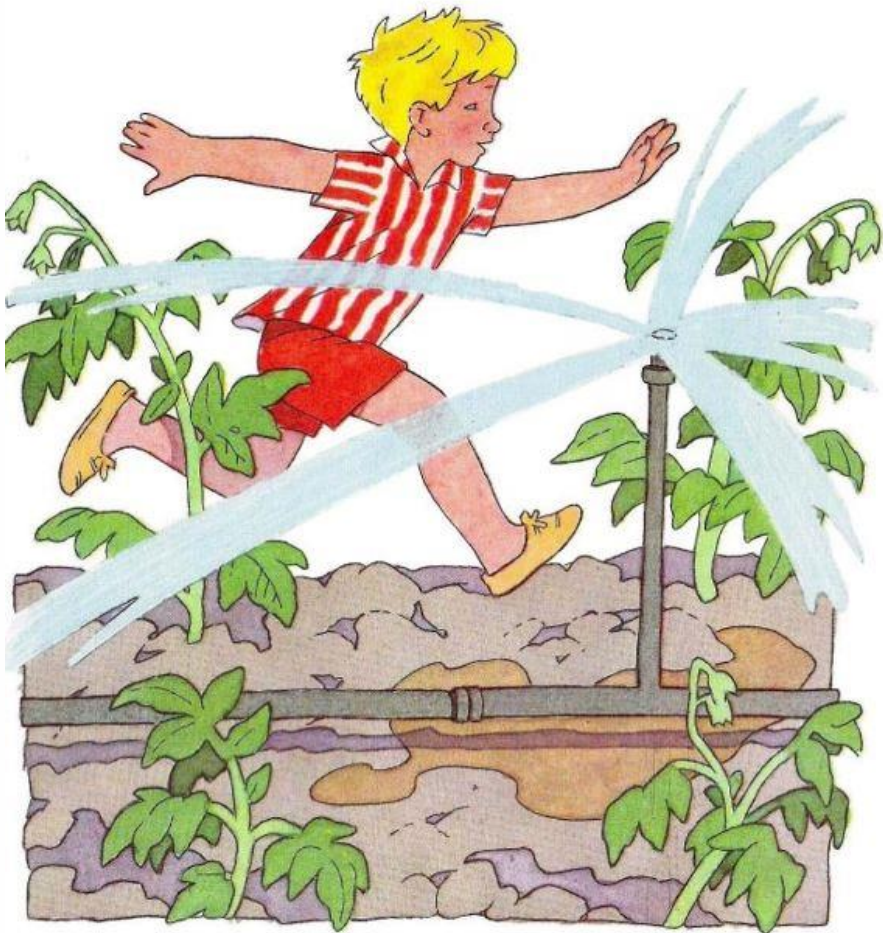
Vanya was puzzled. Was Daddy fooling him? He knew that there could never be any rain on such a hot, sunny day.

Had Daddy simply taken him along to keep him out of mischief? Had Grandma told Daddy to take him, because he didn't mind her and was always getting into trouble?

But Daddy never fooled him.

Vanya didn't know what a sprinkler was, but if Daddy said it was going to rain, it meant it was.

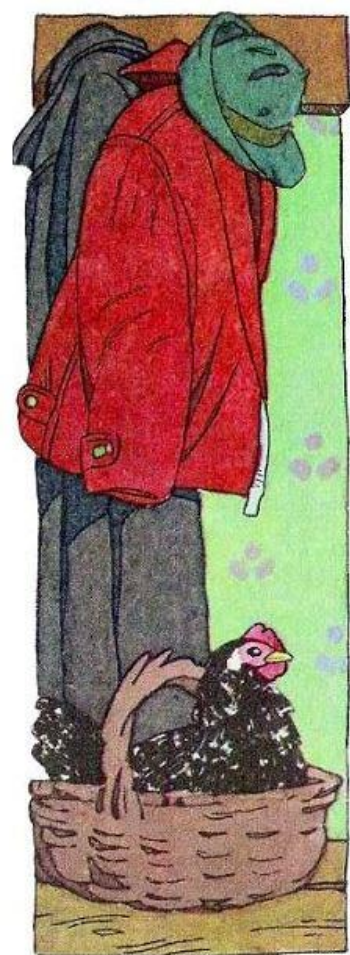
Now Daddy went over to the men, and they all walked to the lake at the far edge of the field. It glittered like a strip of silver. That was the lake the moose had come to drink from at dawn.



Vanya stood waiting.

Suddenly it began to rain, but the rain was not falling from the sky. It was shooting up from the ground. All along the potato field bright streams of water were gushing up and sparkling in the sun. Vanya shouted excitedly. He ran into the field to see where the rain was coming from. There he saw pipes laid along every furrow. The water was spurting from them.

Vanya didn't want to miss anything. He wanted to see the pipes and the holes the water was shooting from. He touched the pipes and ran farther on, and all the while the rain kept raining down on him.



When Daddy came back he said, "How do you like the sprinkler?"

"It's great!"

Then Daddy looked at Vanya closely and stopped smiling.

"You're drenched. And look at the mud on your feet! Why did you run around in the field?"

"I wanted to see all the pipes."

"Well, I can understand that, but what will Grandma say when she sees you?"

Vanya looked at his soggy canvas shoes and said, "But now I know how a sprinkler makes rain."

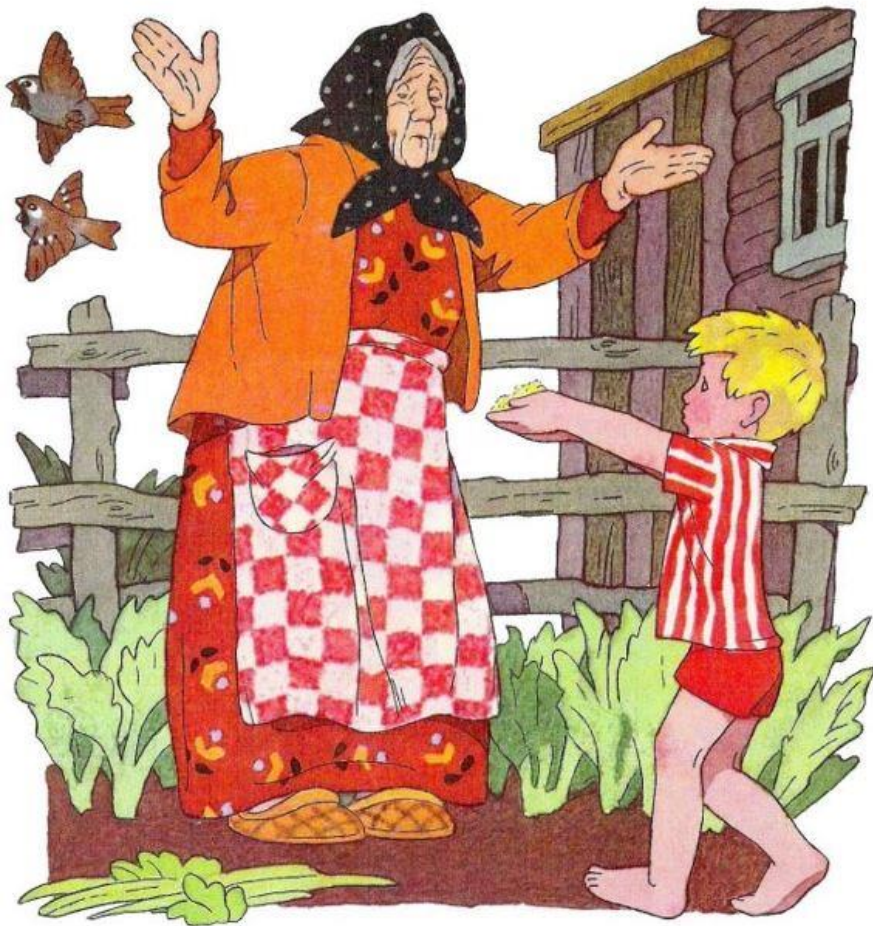
Wednesday

On Wednesday Grandma did not let Vanya go outside.

"I'll be weeding the beets, but you stay here. The hen's chicks are going to hatch today, and I want you to listen for them. The minute you hear them cheeping call me."

Grandma went out to the garden. Vanya squatted beside the hen. He was waiting for the chicks to begin cheeping. The hen was in a basket. It was a black speckled hen with a pink comb. Vanya stared at the hen, and the hen stared back at him. Every now and then it would open its beak, because it was hot.

"I wonder how a chick gets into an egg?" Vanya said to himself. "There's a white and a yolk, but how does the chick get there? How can it grow inside an egg?"



This was something he could not understand, so he stuck his hand under the hen and pulled out an egg. The hen pecked him, but not very hard.

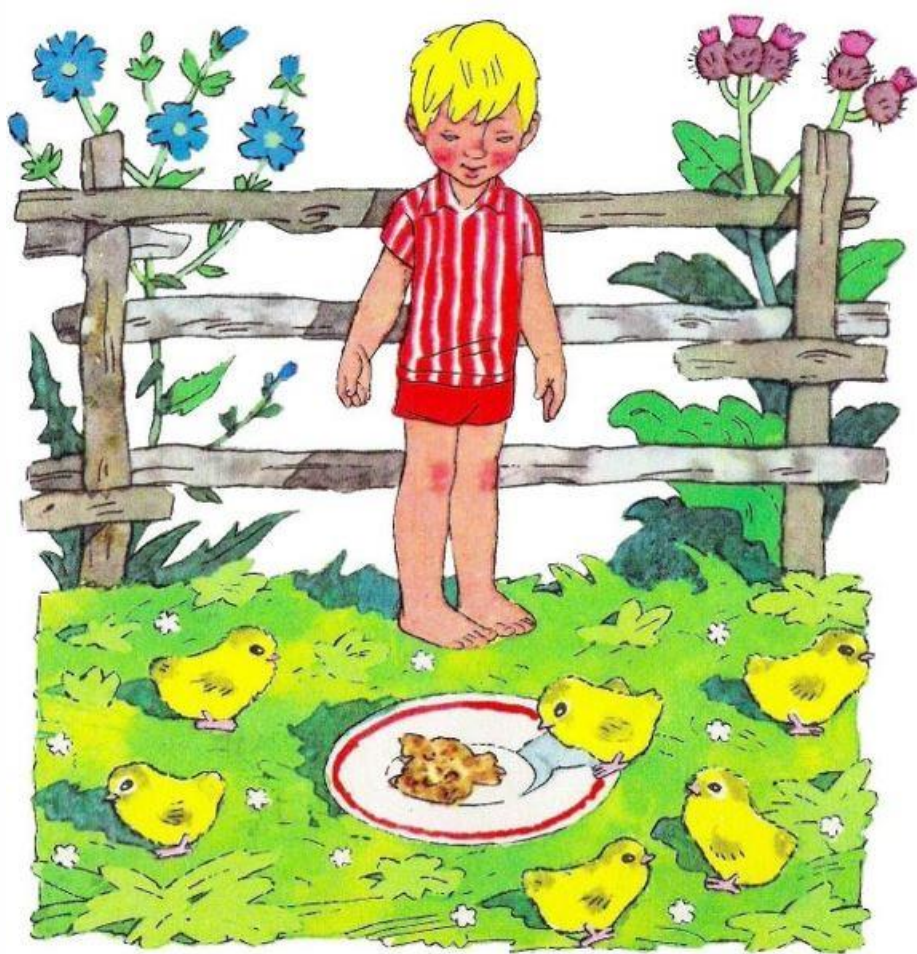
The egg was warm. Vanya held it up to the light. Still, he couldn't see inside it.

"I'll crack the shell and have a look," he decided. And that's just what he did. Inside was a wet little chick. Its eyes were shut, and it wasn't moving. Vanya breathed on the chick and tried to warm it in his hands, but the chick would not come to life. He burst into tears and ran out to the garden to show the chick to Grandma.

"Grandma! You said the chicks would cheep, but they're dead!"

Grandma looked at the chick and threw up her hands.

"Look what you've done! You've killed it! Never crack a shell. When it's time for the chick to hatch it'll peck through the shell itself. My goodness, I can't leave you alone for a minute!"



After lunch both Vanya and Grandma cheered up, because the chicks were beginning to hatch.

Vanya heard the first chick and shouted, "Come here, Grandma! It's hatching!"

Grandma raised one of the hen's wings. There was a fluffy yellow chick with shiny black eyes under it. Grandma threw the empty shell out of the basket.

"Did the chick break the shell all by himself?" Vanya asked. He was really surprised.

"Yes. He pecked through it and got out."

"But what about the others?"

"They will, too. See these little cracks on the eggs?"

She held one up for him to see. There was a tiny crack at the tip of the egg where the chick had pecked at the inside of the shell.

All the chicks were hatched that day. They were soon running around, peeping and learning how to peck at their food.

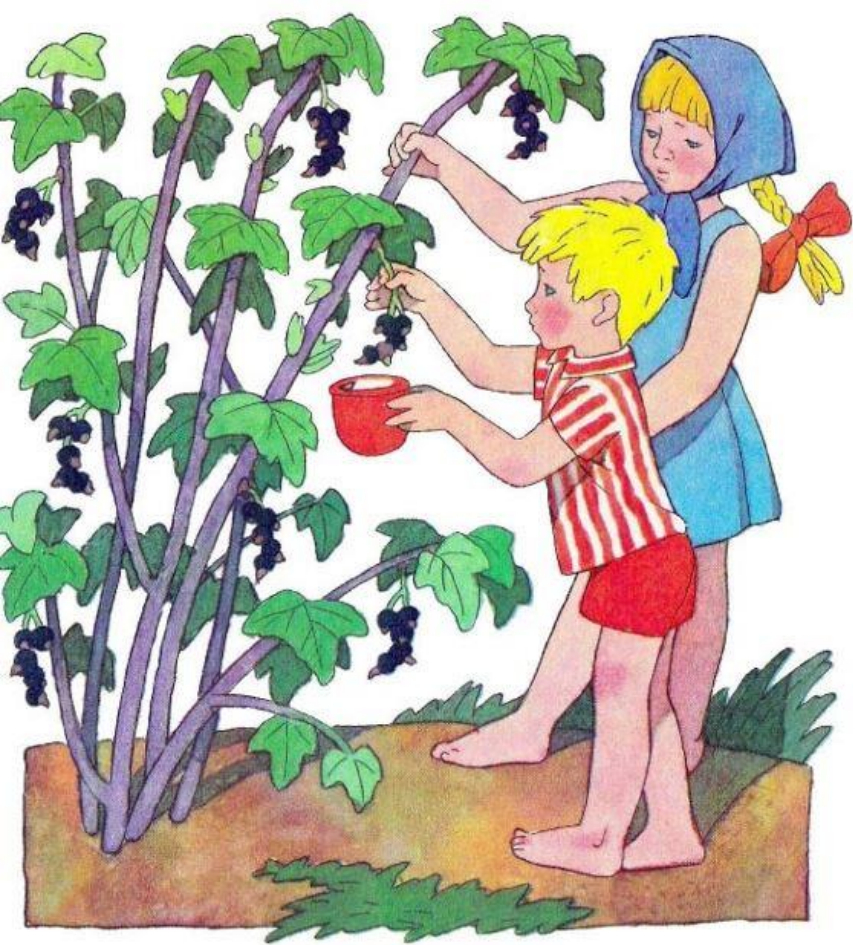


Thursday

The first thing Vanya did when he awoke on Thursday morning was to look at the calendar.

"What's today? Is it a red letter day?"

"I see you're beginning to miss Mommy," Daddy said. "When you're busy working you never feel sad. Your friends are going to the farm orchard to pick black currants today. Why don't you go along with them?"



The children hardly ever went to the collective farm orchard, because Sergei Ivanovich, who was in charge of it, was a very strict man. He'd never let anyone into the orchard who had no business being there. But on Thursday he invited all the grown-ups who were not busy mowing and all the children to the orchard. The black currants were ripe and had to be picked.

Vanya's friends Grinya and Fedya had come to pick berries, too.

"Let's see who picks the most!" Grinya said.

Vanya liked the idea.

Dark, ripe berries peeped at Vanya from under the leaves. He began picking them, one currant here, another there. Then he saw that Grinya had a cupful. And Fedya did, too. But Vanya's cup was only half full. Then Nastya, a big girl who was in the third grade, came over to him and said,

"You're not picking the berries right, Vanya. You have to lift each branch and then pick all the berries on it."



Vanya picked the currants from one branch and they filled his cup to the very top!

"I have a cupful!" he shouted.

"I do too!" Grinya shouted.

And so it went: Vanya would come to empty his cup of currants into the basket and so would Grinya, and so would Fedya. No one wanted to pick less than the others.

When Vanya came home Grandma said,

"Good for you! You didn't get wet today, and you didn't tear your shirt. I know you worked hard because Sergei Ivanovich said you did. That's how I'd like you to be always."



Friday

Grinya and Fedya were going to the meadow for sorrel.

"You can go, too, Vanya," Grandma said. "I'll make you a nice summer soup if you bring me back some sorrel."

It was lovely in the meadow. The grass had not been mown yet. They saw bright flowers everywhere: red ones and yellow ones, and white ones. The meadow was covered with flowers.

The boys spread out and began picking sorrel leaves, moving farther and farther away through the high grass and bright flowers.

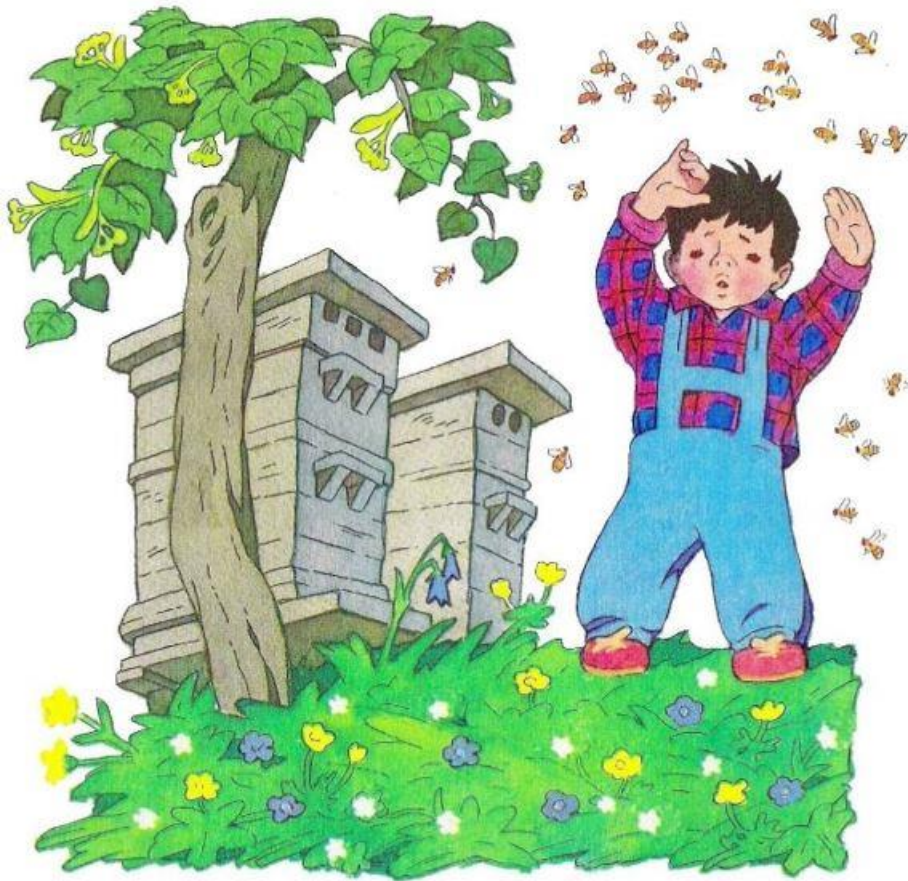
Suddenly Fedya said, "Look at all the bees!"

"Look how many there are! And listen to them buzzing," Vanya said.

"Hey! Let's get out of here!" Grinya shouted. "We're in the bee garden! See the beehives?"

The collective farm had a bee garden. It was surrounded by lindens and acacias. The boys could see the bees' little houses through the branches.

"Back, everybody!" Grinya shouted. "But don't make noise and don't wave your hands, or the bees'll sting you."



The boys started walking away from the bee garden, moving very slowly and keeping their arms close to their sides so as not to make the bees angry. They were nearly out of danger when Vanya heard somebody crying. He turned to look at his friends, but it wasn't Fedya, and it wasn't Grinya. It was little Vasya, the beekeeper's son. He had wandered into the bee garden and was very close to the hives. The bees were stinging him.

"The bees are stinging Vasya!" Vanya shouted.

"What do you want us to do, go in there after him?" Grinya asked. "They'll sting us if we do."

"We'll call his father," Fedya said. "We'll tell him when we pass their house."

Grinya and Fedya hurried away. But Vanya turned around and headed straight towards the beehives.

"Come here!" he shouted to Vasya.

Vasya didn't hear him. He was waving his arms and screaming.



Vanya went right up to him, took his hand and led him out of the bee garden. He walked all the way home with him.



Vasya's mother came running out of the house. She picked him up and scolded.

"What a naughty boy you are! Why did you go to the bee garden? See how badly you've been stung! Then she looked at Vanya. "Oh, dear, look how they've stung you, Vanya! And all because of Vasya. I know it hurts, but it'll go away soon."

"I'm all right," Vanya said. As he walked home his lip kept getting bigger and bigger, and his eyelid kept swelling until his eye closed altogether.

"What a sight!" Grandma exclaimed. "Who were you fighting this time?"

"The bees."

"But why didn't they sting Grinya or Fedya?"

"Because they ran away, and I took Vasya home. It'll go away. I'm all right."

When Daddy came home for lunch he took one look at Vanya and burst out laughing.

"Fedya and Grinya ran away from the bees, but our silly boy went right into the thick of them to rescue Vasya. I can imagine what his mother would say if she could see him now," Grandma said.

Vanya's one good eye stared at Daddy as he waited for him to tell him what Mommy would say. But Daddy smiled broadly, patted his back and said,

"She'd say: what a brave boy I have! That's what she'd say!"

Saturday

The next morning the lumps on Vanya's face were gone. His lip became small again, and his eye was wide open again. He'd forgotten all about the bees, but there he was, thinking about the moose. At breakfast that morning Daddy had said,

"When I rode by the lake early this morning I saw moose tracks on the bank."

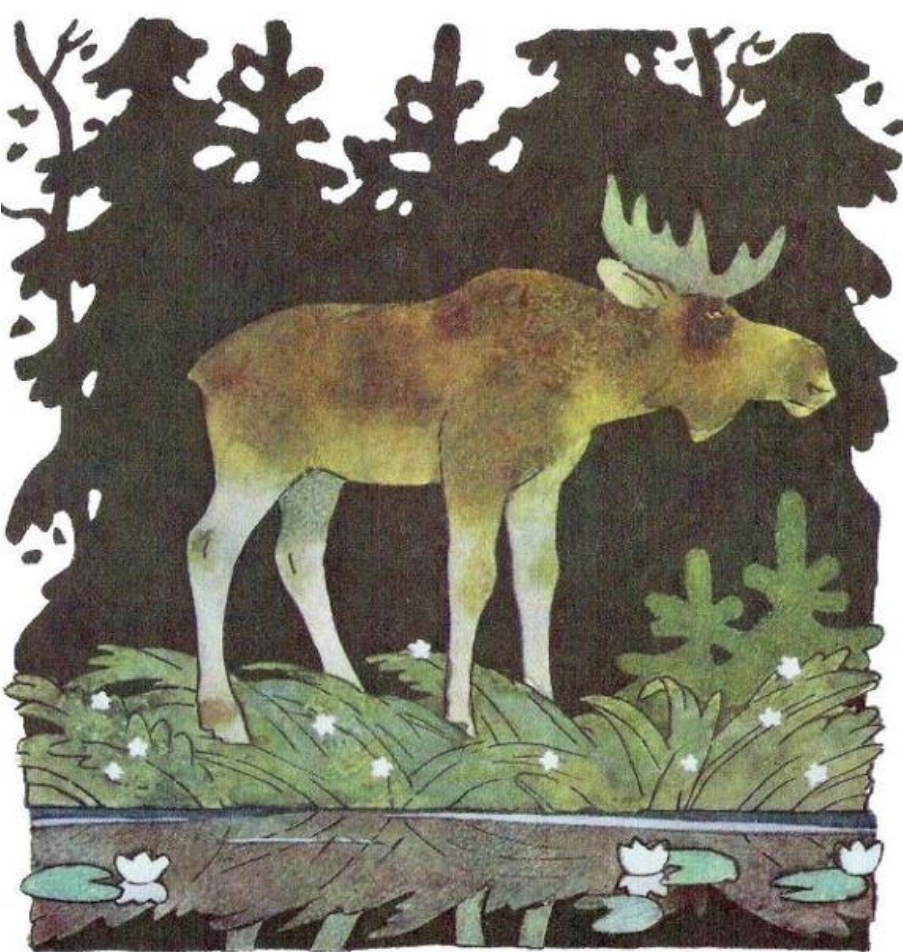
Vanya went out to the porch and gazed at the woods beyond the fields.

After lunch he went to call for Fedya and said, "Let's go and look for the moose."

"All right. But let's call Grinya first."

Soon the three boys were on their way to the woods to look for the moose.

The shaggy branches of the fir trees seemed to be dozing in the warm sun. The farther the boys went into the woods, the darker it became.



After a while Grinya stopped. "I'm not going any farther. We can get lost."

"Then I'm not, either," Fedya said. "What do we care about that moose?"

But Vanya so wanted to see it!

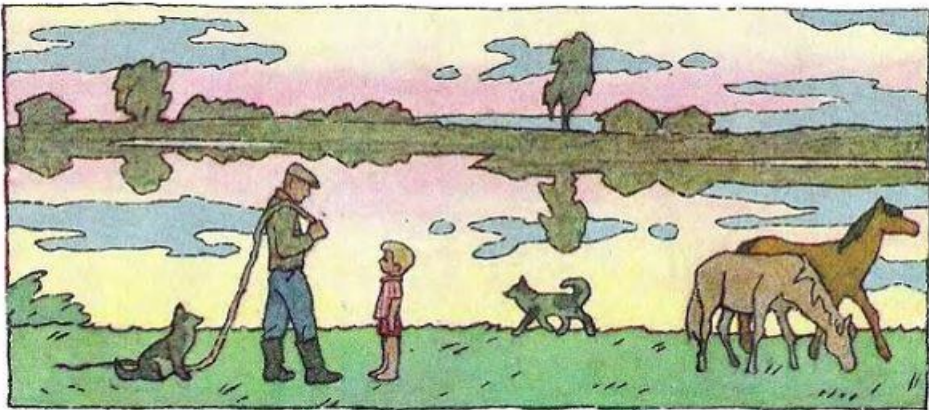
"I won't go very far," he said to himself. "I'll just look in those bushes and then I'll turn back."

That's what he really wanted to do, but all the while he kept going farther and farther into the woods.

When he finally stopped to look around he didn't know which way he had come. He suddenly realized that it was dark in the woods.

Vanya turned and ran back, but lost his way and couldn't find the road. All of a sudden he came to the edge of the lake. The sun was just going down. It flashed one last time like a burning coal in the far-off tree tops and went out. Everything suddenly became dark and gloomy, but the sunset made the lake look flat and pink.

Vanya stopped in his tracks: there was a large animal standing at the edge of the wood. Its head was raised, and it had large antlers. It stood there listening for a while and then moved on to the water's edge.



The animal lowered its head. Through the mist Vanya saw small pink ripples spread across the water.

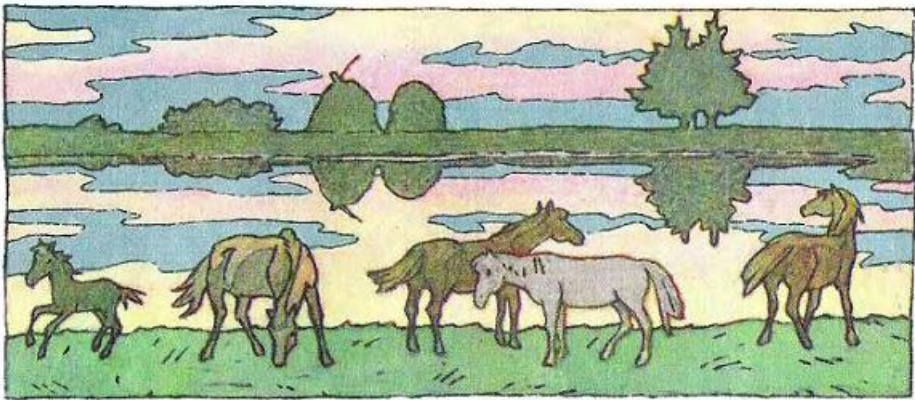
"It's the moose!" he whispered. "There's the moose!"

The moose raised its head, listened for a moment and was gone. It disappeared into the woods so quickly it might never have been there at all.

The herd came out to the meadow. Uncle Andrei, the collective farm shepherd, had brought the horses there to graze in the night. He spotted Vanya.

"What are you doing here all by yourself? Are you lost?" he asked.

"No. I was looking for the moose."



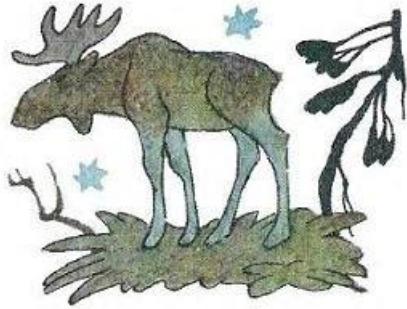
Uncle Andrei smiled. "Do you want to see it that badly?"

"I did see it. I just saw it!"

Just then they heard people shouting in the woods.

"Ha-loo! Ha-loo!"

"They're looking for somebody. Could it be you?" Uncle Andrei asked.

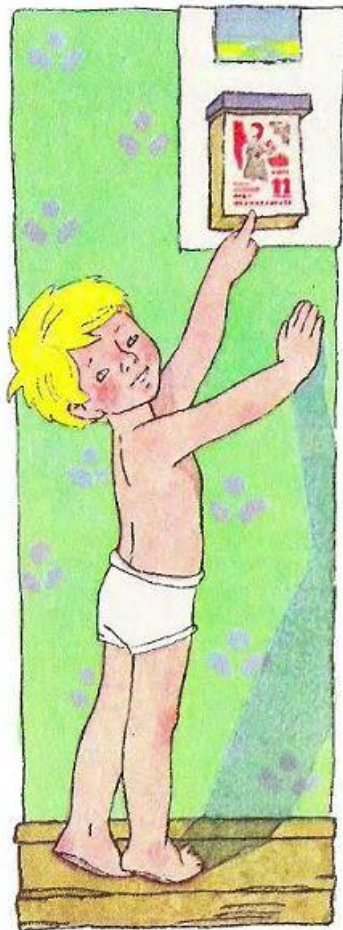


Indeed, they were looking for Vanya: his daddy, the neighbours and the village children. They thought he was lost in the woods.

Daddy was very angry. "Why'd you leave without permission? You know you shouldn't have! Can't you see how worried everybody is?"

Grandma scolded Vanya, too, and as she scolded him she kept wiping away her tears. When everyone finally calmed down Vanya said in a happy voice,

"I saw the moose, Daddy!" and put his arms around his daddy's neck.



Sunday

On Sunday Grandma made hotcakes. Vanya was so tired after his adventure the night before that he overslept.

"Get up, Vanya! The hotcakes are ready!" Daddy called.

But Vanya did not reply.

Then Daddy said, "What's today, Vanya?"

"I don't know."

"I think it's a red letter day."

Vanya sat up in bed. "It is?"

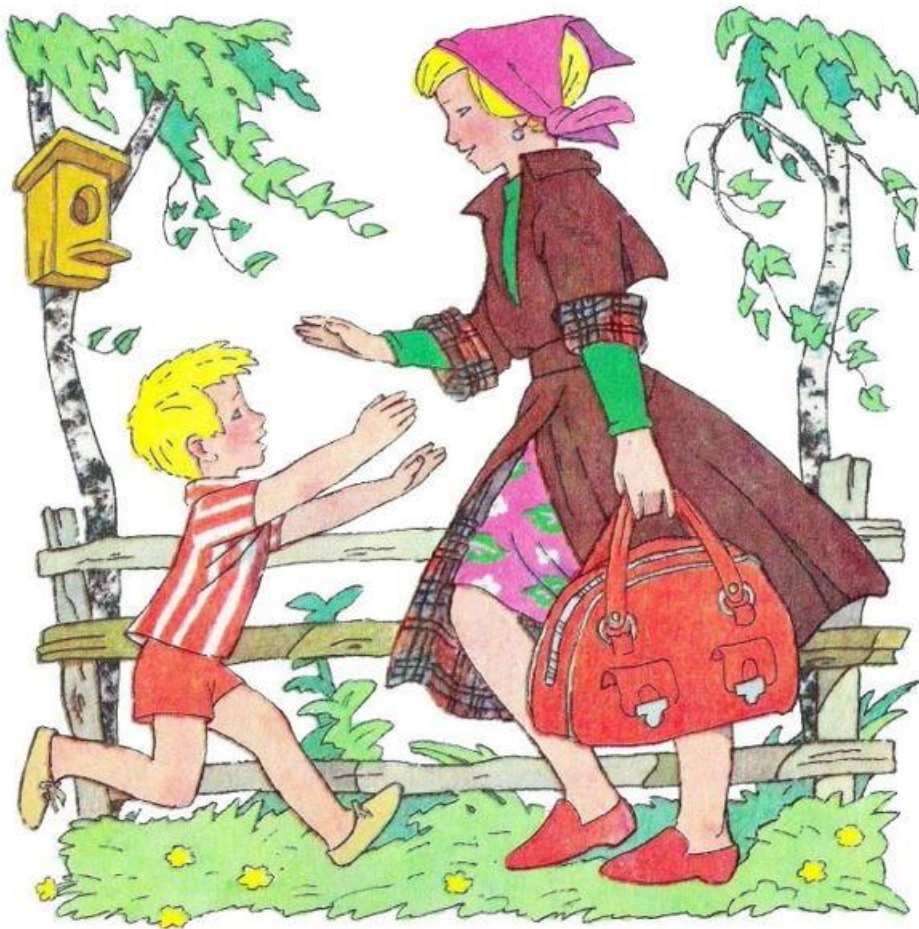
He jumped out of bed, ran over to the calendar and clapped his hands.

"It is! It's a red letter day! Where's my shirt? Where are my shoes?"

Vanya washed quickly, dressed quickly, grabbed a hotcake and ran outside to wait for Mommy. A car drove up as he reached the porch.

"Mommy's back!" he shouted. The car stopped. Mommy was sitting beside the driver. She got out of the car, and Vanya ran up to her. Mommy hugged him.

"Hello, darling! Are you all right? Are you well?"



Mommy went inside and greeted Daddy and Grandma. Then she kissed Vanya again and said, "See how quickly the week went by?"



End